

their plan of even more tax cuts for the rich, and not increase the deficit.

With \$4 trillion in expiring tax provisions later this year, we should use some of that economic capacity to make the tax system more fair and simple while we reduce the debt.

The time to begin that process is now—not making the Tax Code more complex, not favoring those who need help the least, not risking long-term Social Security funding, and not borrowing for unfocused new tax relief. Instead, let's deal with investments like renewable energy and infrastructure. Let's use some of this budget capacity to reduce the overall corporate tax rate while broadening the base and closing loopholes.

Simpler, fairer, better for business. Let's eliminate the tyranny of the alternative minimum tax, protect our energy future, and support renewables. There is a path forward, and we should start on it now. What better way to honor American taxpayers on filing day than getting serious with an agenda that can actually be achieved, and should be.

IRS HARASSMENT OF TEA PARTY GROUPS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCLINTOCK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, a defining aspect of the American tradition is that groups of citizens band together for a wide variety of civic purposes. They recruit volunteers, raise funds, and spend those funds to promote whatever project or cause brings them together.

For more than a century, our tax laws have recognized that such voluntary associations—nonprofits as we call them today—should not be taxed because their proceeds are devoted entirely to improve our communities through education, advocacy, and civic action. Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code recognizes them today, and civic groups as diverse as MoveOn.org, the League of Conservation Voters, the ACLU, the National Rifle Association, and various taxpayer groups have always been included in this definition.

We don't apply a political test to these civic groups. We recognize the fundamental right of Americans to organize and to pool their resources to promote whatever causes they believe in, left or right. Indeed, whatever their political persuasion, these civic groups perform an absolutely indispensable role in our democracy by raising public awareness, defining issues, educating voters, promoting reforms, holding officials accountable, and petitioning their government to redress grievances. Abolition, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement—all would have been impossible without them.

In order to be recognized as nonprofit groups, these organizations must register with the IRS—a purely ministe-

rial function that in the past has been applied evenly and without regard to their political views. At least until now. It seems that Tea Party groups are today being treated very differently than their counterparts on the political left. For the last 2 years, many have been stonewalled by the IRS when they sought to register as nonprofits. Most recently, they have been barraged with increasingly aggressive and threatening demands vastly outside the legal authority of the IRS. Indeed, the only conceivable purpose of some of these demands is to intimidate and harass.

A Tea Party group in my district is typical of the reports that we are now hearing across this country. This group submitted articles of incorporation as a nonprofit to the State of California, and they received approval within a month. But then they tried to register as a nonprofit with the IRS. Despite repeated and numerous inquiries, the IRS stonewalled this group for a year and a half, at which time it demanded thousands of pages of documentation and gave the group less than 3 weeks to produce it.

The IRS demanded the names of every participant at every meeting held over the last 2 years, transcripts of every speech given at those meetings, what positions they had taken on issues, the names of their volunteers and donors, and copies of communications they had with elected officials, and on and on. Perhaps most chilling of all, the organizer of this particular group soon found herself the object of a personal income tax audit by the IRS.

Mr. Speaker, these are groups of volunteers who pass the hat at meetings to pay for renting the hall. They give of their own time to research issues and pay out of their own pockets for printing flyers. The donations made to them aren't tax deductible, so there is no legitimate purpose in asking for the names of their donors, let alone of their volunteers, unless—and this is the fine point of it—unless the purpose is to harass and intimidate.

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Ironically, the same tactics we now see used by the United States against tea parties were once used by the most abusive of the Southern States in the 1950s to intimidate civil rights groups like the NAACP.

No such tactics have been reported by similar civic groups on the political left, so the conclusion is inescapable—that this administration is very clearly, very pointedly, and very deliberately attempting to intimidate, harass, and threaten civic-minded groups with which they disagree, using one of the most feared and powerful agencies of the United States Government to do so.

Mr. Speaker, these facts speak for themselves. They need no embellishment or interpretation. They should alarm every American of goodwill regardless of political philosophy, for if

this precedent is allowed to stand, no one's freedom is safe. I bring these facts to the attention of the House today and ask that they be rigorously investigated and, if found accurate, that those officials responsible be exposed, disgraced, dismissed, and debarred from any further position of trust or power within our government.

STAFFORD LOAN INTEREST RATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. WELCH) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Speaker, in 74 days, this Congress may well hang a financial albatross around the necks of students and families across this country. That's because, on July 1, student interest rates are scheduled to go from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent, literally doubling the interest costs that our kids and their parents are going to have to pay on their education.

We have got to find a way, Republicans and Democrats, to work together and avoid this punishing interest rate increase on our students. This is not about Republicans or Democrats. It's not about red States or blue States. It's not about the 2012 elections. It's about the kids that we all represent. It's about the parents that we all represent.

In my case in the State of Vermont, it's about students like Michael McGurk, who is a freshman at the University of Vermont, and he literally doesn't know whether he's going to be able to go on in college if the interest rates double. It's about parents like Ben Truman and Jennifer Wallace Brodeur, who last month were sitting around the table with their son who was about to go to college and are trying to put the pieces together to be able to afford it.

What this is also about is ground zero for the middle class. This country faces a very fundamental question: Are we a country, are we a Congress that is going to remain committed to expanding and broadening the middle class, making it possible for low-income folks to climb their way into the middle class, making it possible for folks in the middle class to stay there? In order to do that, we have to invest in the future, and that means making it possible, making it affordable, for our kids to get the education they need to get that start.

Student debt in this country is at a crisis point. At \$900 billion, student debt outpaces that of credit cards, outpaces that of auto loans, and there is no end in sight. In Vermont—and again, this has nothing to do with what their political affiliation is—nearly 70 percent of our college students graduate with a debt of about \$30,000. That's real money. That's more than many of those students will make in their first years out of college. It's a tough job market, and entry level jobs don't pay a lot. Students are totally at the mercy of a system that is out of

control. The average tuitions at 4-year public universities rose by over 8 percent last year, so costs are going up even as student aid is going down.

A recent poll found that 75 percent of Americans viewed college as unaffordable. That can't be something that we allow to continue. People need to have confidence that that ticket to the middle class is there and that it's affordable. That's why we, together, have to find a way to avoid this doubling of interest rates. For over 8 million students in this country, Stafford loans are a very critical resource, helping them afford the cost of that college education we all want them to get.

With the Federal Government now borrowing money at close to 2 percent, why are we asking middle class families to pay 6.8 percent? These are not grants. These are loans. They'll be repaid. Let's find a way to help our kids and to help our parents.

AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues in the House, I was home for the last 2 weeks on our Easter break. It continues to amaze me why we in Congress do not listen to the American people.

I represent the Third Congressional District of North Carolina—the home of Camp Lejeune Marine Base, Cherry Point Marine Air Station, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, and over 60,000 retired veterans. Not one person has said to me that we need to stay in Afghanistan. I'm not exaggerating, Mr. Speaker. Everyone I saw and had a conversation with, when the issue of Afghanistan came up, said, Get out. Get out now.

That's why I wanted to be on the floor today, because the administration keeps saying, Well, in 2014, in 2014.

Yesterday, when driving back to D.C., I was listening to C-SPAN, and I heard an interview with Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey. I have a lot of respect for both men, but it was kind of vague when Secretary Panetta said to the reporter who asked him our plans for 2014, Well, you know, we're hoping that we can train the Afghans to stabilize their own country.

Mr. Speaker, I say this respectfully: That's an iffy proposition at best.

In a recent Washington Post-ABC News poll, only 30 percent of the American people say the war has been worth fighting. The citizens of this country are tired of sending their loved ones to die for a country we have not been able to change in a decade. I'll even go further and say this: It has never changed in the history of Afghanistan going back to Alexander the Great. So why are we still there? Again, people say, Well, we've got to stabilize the country.

We can't even stabilize America's economy.

Sometimes it gets a little bit ridiculous when I look at all the money being spent overseas, particularly in a country like Afghanistan, and we say to the people of eastern North Carolina and to the people in the 50 States, We don't have money to fix your infrastructure; but yet, Mr. Karzai, you corrupt leader, we are proud to keep sending you \$10 billion a month.

Talking about Mr. Karzai brings me to an editorial written by Eugene Robinson, a syndicated columnist, and it's titled, "Afghanistan and Indefensible Costs." I feel that Mr. Robinson, who wrote this in 2010, could be writing it right now in 2012, and it would have even more meaning. I quote from Mr. Karzai:

The time has come to reduce military operations. The time has come to reduce the presence of, you know, boots in Afghanistan . . . to reduce the intrusiveness into the daily Afghan life.

This is what President Karzai said to the Washington Post. In his column in 2010 that he could be writing today, in April 2012, this is what Mr. Robinson said in response to Karzai:

All right then. Let's save American lives and a ton of money. Let's oblige him.

Mr. Robinson, thank you.

I hope and pray that this Congress, when we debate the DOD bill in May—and we have amendments from both sides saying that we must have a more defined end to this involvement in Afghanistan—that we will pass some of these legislative amendments.

Mr. Speaker, I've got so many of these posters. I've brought with me today one of a tragic scene of a soldier, marine, airman, Navy, whatever it might be, in a coffin, going to his or her grave. That brings me to my last point: the "Body of War," which is a production by Phil Donahue and Ellen Spiro. I'm going to be talking more about this, because this young man is paralyzed from his breast down, and about what he has to go through to live. This Congress needs to meet its constitutional responsibility. Any other involvement by our country needs to be a declaration of war.

Mr. Robinson, thank you again.

And I close. God, please, God, please continue to bless our men and women in uniform, the families of our men and women in uniform, the wounded and their families. And God, please continue to bless America.

□ 1030

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning with good news and bad news.

This news comes by way of my hometown newspaper, the Houston Chronicle, and I'm proud that they have printed and published the news that I'm about to share with the public. The

bad news is that Mr. Yondell Johnson was accosted and beaten on the streets of Houston, Texas, simply because of his race. This is bad news for anyone in our great country, a country that believes in liberty and justice for all.

The good news, however, is they were prosecuted and they were convicted in a Federal court pursuant to the James Byrd hate crime law, and I'm honored to tell you that that law passed here in this Congress in 2009 and was signed into law. It is properly styled as the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. It was supported by many people and organizations expressing goodwill. The NAACP supported it, the ADL supported it, a good many Members of this Congress supported it, and many others supported this law. This law allowed the prosecution to take place in a Federal court, when these three men would have been charged in a State court, and if convicted, faced misdemeanor charges.

In this, the greatest country in the world, no one should have to fear for life or liberty simply because of who you are, simply because of your race, your ethnicity, your gender, your sexuality. It shouldn't happen in this country.

The truth is that in this case there was some testimony with reference to one of the defendants having dated a person of African ancestry. There was testimony that he did not appear to be the kind of person that would be considered a white supremacist. But here is another truth that we have to deal with. The truth is that there is confusion about the hate crime law. There's a misunderstanding. This law does not allow you to impose dastardly deeds upon persons simply because you are of the same race as the person that you are assaulting.

The truth is that if you assault and target a person because of race, it doesn't matter what your race is, and you are committing a hate crime. The truth is that you can be of the same race and commit a hate crime. The victim and the perpetrator can be of the same race and you will still have a hate crime. We need to rid ourselves of this foolish notion that this law was passed in some way to assault persons who are of an ethnicity or a race that we have traditionally, in this country, found to be engaged in some of these kinds of activities. It's not targeted at any given race; it's targeted at people who commit crimes against other people simply because of who these people are.

I remind you that an injustice against any one of us is a threat to justice for every one of us, and we all have a duty to make sure that we don't send out some silly notion that this law was designed for one race of people. This law was designed for every person who would commit a hate crime against another person.

So I'm saddened to say this morning that the bad news is Mr. Johnson had